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13 January 2005

IDN43304.E

Indonesia: Update to IDN43291.E of 7 January 2005 on the impact of the 26 December 2004 earthquake and tsunami on the human rights situation, particularly in the province of Aceh
Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board, Ottawa

Distribution of Aid and Military Conflict in Aceh

A number of human rights organizations, including Human Rights Watch and a coalition of Canadian human rights groups, have called on separate occasions for the withdrawal of the Indonesian military from the relief effort (HRW 6 Jan. 2005; *Globe and Mail* 7 Jan. 2005). According to a representative of the human rights group, Alternatives, a renewed offensive by the military against the Free Aceh Movement (GAM) "prevents many tsunami victims from receiving help because they are afraid of being suspected as separatists" (ibid.). For its part, Human Rights Watch pointed to reports it received from some "credible" non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that they "have been pressured or even required to turn over aid to the military for delivery," and furthermore, that the military has not distributed aid to tsunami survivors it suspected of being GAM supporters (HRW 6 Jan. 2005). No corroboration of these reports could be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate.

Indonesian authorities announced restrictions on the movement of foreign aid workers beyond the provincial capital, Banda Aceh, and the western town of Meulaboh, citing threats of attack by the GAM (BBC 11 Jan. 2005; Reuters 11 Jan. 2005). Specifically, all foreign organizations in Aceh have been asked to register names of their workers with Indonesian officials along with their travel plans outside of the two major towns (BBC 12 Jan. 2005). The Indonesian Armed Forces (TNI) is also to accompany all foreign workers and journalists on travels beyond Banda Aceh and Meulaboh, and will be posted on foreign ships and aircrafts transporting aid into the province (AFP 12 Jan. 2005). According to some media reports, foreign workers who fail to inform Indonesian authorities of their travel plans face expulsion (AP 12 Jan. 2005; CBC 12 Jan. 2005). The Indonesian Welfare Minister rejected allegations that the government was attempting to regain control of the entire province, insisting that the new rules would help to coordinate all humanitarian activities (AFP 12 Jan. 2005; see also Deutsche Presse Agentur 12 Jan. 2005). While the United Nations remarked that its relief teams had not experienced any threats from rebels, it noted concern that the new restrictions would create "bottlenecks in aid deliveries" (BBC 13 Jan. 2005; see also UN News Service 12 Jan. 2005).

Indonesian officials also requested that foreign troops assisting in relief efforts in Aceh leave the province by the end of March 2005 at the latest (AFP 12 Jan. 2005; BBC 12 Jan. 2005; CBC 12 Jan. 2005). The United States announced that it would seek clarification from the Indonesian government on this request (CBC 12 Jan. 2005; BBC 13 Jan. 2005). Troops from the United States, Singapore, Australia and Japan are, or will be, assisting in the humanitarian effort in Aceh (ibid. 12 Jan. 2005).

While Indonesian authorities insisted that the threat of attack by rebels outside the towns of Banda Aceh and Meulaboh was "genuine" (AFP 12 Jan. 2005), the GAM stated it would "never attack aid workers," foreign or Indonesian (Reuters 11 Jan. 2005). Claims by the Indonesian Armed Forces (TNI) that the GAM had kidnapped an aid worker and looted relief convoys could not be independently verified, according to Deutsche Presse Agentur (12 Jan. 2005). According to the same press agency, villagers and aid workers have expressed concern of being caught in a crossfire between the TNI and GAM (Deutsche Presse Agentur 13 Jan. 2005). However, on 13 January 2005, a GAM leader-in-exile, Malik Mahmud, stated the group was committed to the unilateral ceasefire it had declared following the tsunami, and furthermore, that it was willing to enter into discussions with the Indonesian government to "ensure the success of the ceasefire" (AFP 13 Jan. 2005a; see also BBC 13 Jan. 2005). Meanwhile, Indonesia announced it would send thousands of additional troops to Aceh, reportedly to help in the relief effort, bringing the total number of Indonesian troops in the province beyond 50, 000 (AFP 13 Jan. 2005a).

Presence of Islamic Groups

More than 200 members of the Laskar Mujahidin (or Islamic Law Enforcement) group have reportedly arrived in Aceh and set up a relief camp (CNN 6 Jan. 2005). About 50 of those members were flown in on Indonesian military planes, which have also carried other NGOs into the province (ibid.). The International Crisis Group (ICG), which is monitoring the situation in Aceh, has indicated that some members of the Laskar Mujahidin have been sent back amid concerns that their presence may cause tension with foreign aid workers (AFP 13 Jan. 2005b). The

Laskar Mujahidin, which allegedly has ties with the "terrorist" organization Al Qaeda, was set up in the late 1990s and became involved in attacks against Christians in Indonesia's Maluku islands (CNN 6 Jan. 2005; see also GAM 9 Jan. 2005.). According to CNN, "[s]ectarian violence [in the Maluku islands] left about 9,000 dead in 1999-2001" (6 Jan. 2005). The ICG said the Laskar Mujahidin, which also falls under the umbrella organization called the Indonesian Mujahidin Council (MMI) (*Washington Times* 11 Jan. 2005), would likely not receive widespread support from the Acehnese (AFP 13 Jan. 2005b; see also CNN 6 Jan. 2005).

The GAM released a statement branding the two Islamic groups that have descended on Aceh, the Islamic Defenders Front (FPI) and the MMI, as unwelcome "criminal" organizations whose presence will only hinder the humanitarian effort (GAM 9 Jan. 2005). In its statement, the GAM claimed the Indonesian government was "wasting valuable funds by assisting these criminal organizations to travel to and stay in [Aceh]" (ibid.). The separatist group also said "[t]he actions and words of the FPI and MMI are against [Islamic teachings] and contradict the tolerance and faith of [Acehnese] Muslims" (ibid.).

This Response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Research Directorate within time constraints. This Response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim for refugee protection. Please find below the list of additional sources consulted in researching this Information Request.

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Additional Sources Consulted

Internet sites, including: Amnesty International, International Crisis Group, Radio Free Asia.

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